

Hymns to the Great Constellations

III: The Great Cat

Bearing the bleak winter solitude,
Soaked through and stinging with bitter wind,
We in the mountainous altitudes
Fly to the fire of thy clemency
Now, while the white striketh cold and blind,
Now, with the snow weighing heavily,
Down, double-bent in the pounding gale
Gracious assistance from thee to find
Warm home and hearth afore daylight fails

Lightless we walk where the hunters prowl,
Knee-deep in drifts under harsh duress,
Hearing each hour such howls that
Skewer the heart with a hot despair,
Spurning the urge to recline and rest
Long, lest the predators everywhere
Tear tooth and claw at our company;
Cat, unto thee we our cries address:
Drive off the Wolf and the wicked fiend!

Cat, holy hunter, the keen-eyed who
Sees through the deepest of nights as though
Noonday, come soon to our rescue to
Bat away phantoms and laugh as they
Flee into fissures and out of the
Glow of the snow-melting shafts of the
Sun shaken out of thy starry coat;
String golden bow with barbed arrow,
Fix spear to the flesh of the fearsome foe

From The Abyss arise terrible
Nightmares, the forms of which folk cannot
Fathom, their bleating unbearable;
Still we stand fast with our faces set
Firmly as flint, for these perils ought
Not to perturb us; the fowler's net
Fails to ensnare us, his cleverness
Pales afore thee and his plots fall to
Naught, for Cat laughs at the treacherous

How dare the devils, decreeing our
Doom, still so brashly assail us when
We bear a banner with all-seeing
Eyes all emblazoned? Great Cat! O thou
Hope of the hills, to our help hasten

swiftly, for we scrape the soil to bow
Low; with thy blade bite the reprobate,
Spit with thy spear the dread serpent, rend
Flesh with thy fangs in the forthcoming fray

Cat, our courageous commander who
Blunts every blade of the enemy,
Tear out the beard of Black Goat, come do
Battle with those who work violence;
Feeling the sting of the nine-tails, their
Arrogant barbs sink to silence
Afore thee, destroyer of demons,
Unshakable safeguard whose melody
Endlessly warm home and hearth defends

Cat! O Great Cat! To the aid of thy
Kittens come swiftly with bristling
Hackles and burning with holy ire;
Forth, mighty hunter! The demons shall
Flee from the gleam of thy glistening
Fangs, into which they shall surely fall
Headlong and helpless while we intone
hymns which invoke in the listening
Thy sure protection of hearth and home!

IV: The Great Wolf

When the world was set in motion,
When the Wheel of Time began to turn,
Thou didst perceive the ocean tides, O Wolf,
And all their secrets learned

Thou knowest both Great Days and Years
With all signs secret and portentous,
So to send the faithful spheres
Along their endless, winding way

The faces of the Moon thou readest
As a book, her luminescent
Countenance as she proceedeth
From the full, to new, to crescent

Yea, thou art the Moon's attendant,
Maiden fleeting as the fairest doe,
In purity resplendent
And with sunlight all aglow

Delightest she to fool the wise
With hidden mirror-pools of silver,

Knowing that mere fleshly eyes
By moonlight ever are bewildered

Close behind thou talest after,
Longing for thy mistress Moon,
She to tease with rabbit's laughter,
Thou to howl the pining tune:

“O laver giving shape to sunlight,
Silver basin of the golden day,
Thou dost outline the night
When other lights have gone away!”

But out of time and out of season
Hurls the coward Goat his stones,
Hoping by his act of treason
Heaven's reign to overthrow

An icy blast he blows in summer,
Darkness sows he at the noon,
Forbids the winter snow to cover,
Raves against the placid Moon

Hear, Great Wolf, our sure protector,
Watcher in the wicked night,
Save us from the hateful specter,
Put the enemy to flight

Deliver from untimely death,
For thou art he who runneth on
To Whitsun from the wintry depths,
From darkness to the gate of dawn

V: The Great Bear

O faithful, most excellent lover of gentleness,
Watchful protectress of folk and of beast,
Thou doting den mother so matchless in innocence,
Mender of rents over all of the East

Thou balmer of bruises and grinder of remedies,
Keeper of quietude, binder of wounds,
With ears ever open and heart full of charity
Hearing the wails of those lost in the woods,

Come find us and save us, for we are thy wards,
We have all of us nursed of the milk of thy gifts;
Rush unto our aid, stave off fever and sword,
Ever seeking the babe from the bosom to rip

For thieves never ceasing to break in and steal
Are encroaching upon us, our hearts to invade
Whilst all bristling with pestilent talons concealed,
With such terrible strength and a hunger for prey

Yet we, thy dear children, shall laugh them to scorn,
We shall watch on in safety while every foe falls,
For naught of the darkest Abyss has been born
Which Great Bear could not best with a blow from her paw

Such unflinching strength, incontestable will
Which belongs to the mother defending her young,
Thy limbs, thick as hickory,
Cradle our still-sleeping kindred through evening 'til mornsong is sung

To the aid of the wounded, high healer, come hasten,
Thou savior and salver of all things that live;
While we await morning, be our consolation
'Til bright, blessed sunlight the victory gives

For thou art a Star, nay, a Great Constellation,
A throne in the court of the unfading sun;
We await thine arrival with anticipation,
Await the fair dawn when Abyss is undone

VI: The Great Rabbit

Under gardens full to overflowing with the
Greenest lettuce and most savory spices growing
By the mindful sight and skillful hands of rabbits
Cultivating paradise of sage and carrot
Lie such cozy homes where hearth is ever glowing,
Which such quaint, industrious gardeners inhabit

Burrows stretching under verdant miles, vaulted
Gates of polished marble marking the exalted
Halls where raucous revels melt away to intimate
Lullabies for kittens who before the fire
Lie in dreams of derring-do, with beauty scented
By the smoke of cedar which such strength of will creates

But now, O regal Rabbit, Constellation shining
Down upon our faces, who illumines guiding
Wisdom in all matters, kindly come, enlighten
Us, for night has fallen, and close behind come nightmares
Trailing, scenting unsuspecting rabbits, sighing
Hungriely, clawing earth to stupefy and frighten

For from the world without come crawling monsters storming
Warren door and pounding earthen roof with roaring
Threat of force in service of the roiling shadow
While the waiting rabbit sentries swiftly go to
Take up hammers, sound the wooden warren warning
Rousing soldiers wielding deadly bow and arrow

But from within the danger is no less severe, and
Soldiers highly seasoned cannot break the spears of
Desperation born of fatal melancholy
Or the deadly draw into the deep, a folly
Wafting to the nostrils up from caverns damp and drear,
The icy fingers of the sly Abyss to grip the body

O Great Rabbit, in thy pity look upon our home,
For it is threatened by such foes who glower
Up from swampy tar and call us down to meet them,
Clawing at our ankles, tearing at our cloaks;
Hemmed in, for so we are upon this witching hour,
Rescue swift of thee we ask from those who overwhelm us

Our kittens in their cribs preserve from deadly poison,
Quiet in their sleep away from any noisome
Racket from antagonistic spirits, who though
Crafty be, in abject terror flee to shadows
From thy sun-warmed voice which easily destroys them,
To their coward's lair to lick deserved wounds below

Defend! Defend! O blessed Rabbit, come to cleanse
The air of wicked influence and flood our dens with
Sunlight which engenders clarity and bolsters
Courage capable of making us the bolder;
Fill our legs with strength to stand and so contend with
Any threat, the weight of warren roof to shoulder

Cast out the demons from within and from without,
Pursue and chase them down, the enemy to rout
Until the day the yawning maw itself is burned away,
The heavy fog dispelled by holy Flame;
O bringer of the sun which causes seed to sprout,
Send forth the selfsame sun these rabbitfolk to save

VII: The Great Dragon

Roll back, obscuring clouds!
For from the lofty vaults of day
Descends the mighty Dragon,
Captain of the Starry host
Whose very voice resounds

With thunder, and whose lightnings flay
The sky in twain, the blackened
Night to brighten, the Eleven's boast!

In highest heaven dwellest
Thou as blessed sun's attendant,
By the burning furnace
Burnished, with eternal fire aflame;
A multiflorous swell
Of feathers to thy neck appended,
Skirtest thou the surface
Of the sky where birds thy grace acclaim

Adorned with shining scales
Of purest crystal, seeded by the sun,
O Dragon, wholly wise,
Reveal to us the splendor of its light
By scattering as hail
A host of colored rays, which would as one
Forever blind the eyes
With shaft of clear and piercing white

Send down the early rains
To raise the golden ears of corn
And grow the copal tree,
For all the cloudy storehouses
Were given to thy maintenance,
And all of earth are born,
And live, and move, and breathe
By what of dirt and heaven's dew doth sprout

Yet though in highest heaven
Shines thy feathered head, thy tail
Doth skim the dread Abyss
And shaketh off such pearls of peerless price
That oyster mouths commend;
Thou art the rainbow in the fish's scales,
And yet no less than this
Thou art the rainbow in the sky

The Treasure of the Deep!
How fittingly thy name befits thy station;
To the ever-raving enemy
Sunk down below a thousand pounds of pride
Thou art a scourge who streaks
With lightning; by thy castigation
Thrashing sea finds peace,
By thee is boundless ocean bound

Thine iridescent cords
Surround the whole of heaven's span,
From Morning Star arising
To the West where glorious Horse takes wing;
To thee was shown the order
Of the world and all its plans,
The four foundations wisely jointed
With their every hidden spring

The Wheel of Time as well
Is thine to read, that ancient dial
Telling signs and seasons
And the circuits of the sun;
But wretched Goat's rebellion
Rent a fissure forty miles
Wide, a dread upheaval
Leaving all of history undone

So now all time is sundered
From its source, the winter's end
Shrinks back from spring's beginning,
Inward turn the misbegotten
Circles, falling under
With each revolution, bending
Into spirals, spinning
Down to dread Abyss to be forgotten

Arise, therefore, O Lady!
From such fiendish convolutions
Free us, for the tyrant
Knoweth we are bound to time,
And so our mortal fate he
Wieldeth, tempting to a dread conclusion
All who in defiance
Dare to imitate his crimes

Arise, O Morning Star!
Fly forth to meet our direst need
From heaven's highest hook and
Check the cold Abyss with talons
Grim and honed for war;
Take up the blessed sun and lead
Thy host against the crooked,
Smash his brash and boastful challenge

Arise, O great Sun-Serpent!
Strike with fiery bite the foe
Whose cloven hooves did rend
In two the whole created order;

Fly to save thy servants
While we labor here below,
'Til cloven time is mended
Henceforth and forevermore

IX: The Great Fox

A song of never-ending praise
To Fox the Wise now let us raise,
To thee, whose seven tails display
The sun's caressing rays, O Fox!

Who first descended from the skies
With entourage of fireflies,
The first-enlightened folk to guide
Forth from the night, O Fox!

Within thy sable mouth is fire held,
A Flame of wisdom to dispel
The hateful lies of hell,
Our great protector Fox!

For cedar torches sevenfold
Thou wieldest deftly, and behold!
The sparks they scatter drive away
The winter cold, O Fox!

And we who find in thee a guide
Shall ne'er grow lost, but shall abide
To endless ages in the noontide
'Neath the blessed sun, O Fox!

But ah! The faith of folk is fickle,
Swayed so quickly by the ticklish
Fictions woven by the trickster
Tyrant but for thee, O Fox!

For while the scheming enemy
May sly and crafty seem to be,
His devious conspiracies
Are jests to thee, O Fox!

A counterfeiter is the Goat,
An insubstantial shadow gloating,
But for all his raucous boasting,
Wiser still art thou, O Fox!

His haughtiness thou shalt throw down
And in his hubris he shall drown,

In fetors forged of foolishness
Forever bound beneath the Fox!

For thou canst trick the trickster god,
His fraudulence with ease defraud,
With worthy wisdom strip his sly facade
From graceless face, O Fox!

Thy brushes, burning brands, shall sweep
The earth and she shall be made clean,
No shadow left to stain or sully
Where thy paws have trod, O Fox!

And so in supplication bold
We sing to thee within the cold,
Send down thy fire sevenfold
Upon the enemy, O Fox!

Incinerate the dread Abyss,
Repel its pestilential mists,
Send down the blessed sun to kiss us
With his living rays, O Fox!

X: The Great Rooster

O brother come and rouse thyself
For vigil we are keeping
In case the enemy should come
And find that we are sleeping

The night is long, the clouds are thick
No stars to mark the hours
The watch has changed, how many times?
Has dark the world devoured?

Nay, I say, it is not so
Though slowly snake the minutes
But keep thy lamp alight and trimmed
Define the shadow's limit

The faithful firmament remains
Though clouded hang the heavens,
Unerring lights to lead and guide
Throughout the night's procession

Doubt not the coming crow, but cry
To Rooster's Comb, look east!
For he shall come as in that day of old
To deem the night complete

Take up the Ash and Flame, go forth
In song to shield the sleeping
Till morning finds them safe and sound
And we our vigil keeping

Be brave, O brother! Bend thine ear,
Await in expectation
The Cock's commanding clarion,
The sun's annunciation

There is no wraith, no Waiting Wolf
Who shall not be consumed
When he shall mount the mountaintops
Declaring demon's doom

A herald at the gates of dawn
With song the day adorning
His comb stands tall
Against the fiery fingers of the morning

And dawn shall break, it shall be so,
I say it true and surely,
As on the long-awaited day
When morning came with fury

When Mighty Rooster fiercely crowed,
A song of war he bellowed,
The death-knell of the endless night
Throughout the Mountains echoed

The wisest demons knew to flee
They saw the shadow waning
For on its heels the sunrise set
The very sky a-flaming

And so the regal Rooster stood
With wings spread wide, entrancing,
A crown of clear carnelian
Before the dawn advancing

A welcome sight for weary eyes,
For those who watched unsleeping,
Who neither napped nor nodded off
Throughout their vigil-keeping

Take heart! This darkness too shall pass,
We shall not wait forever;
Behold, the blessed sun burns white

On noble Rooster's feathers

We look to thee, O Morning Star
As to a radiant banner
And ask that thou shouldst crow afresh
To make the demons scatter

For lo! the beastly, cold Abyss
Is belching forth its monsters,
Who just beyond our burning wicks
Across the shadows wander

Mere chaff, they scatter 'neath thy wings,
Thou bold celestial crier;
The terrors into terror thrown
To vainly flee the fire

Great Rooster, come and rouse thyself
For vigil we are keeping
In case the enemy should come
And find that we are sleeping

The night is long, the clouds are thick,
No moon to mark the hours;
But shine thou forth, O Star,
And make the black Abyss to cower!

XI: The Great Horse

Hark! Oh, hearken, foe, and quake,
Thou workers of all wickedness,
For over West's horizon wakes
A sound to shake the cold Abyss

The drumming of the soldier's hooves,
The tenor of the trumpet blare,
A song of swords from scabbards loosed
We offer as our battle-prayer

Hasten to our aid, Great Horse,
Arise and wage thy righteous war;
Go forth, O champion, with our host,
Take up the shield and flaming sword!

Turn aside the demon's darts,
Make sport of the pursuing band;
Lay waste to his ignoble arts
With thine all-honorable hand!

Strike down the Ever-Waiting Wolf,
His foul, snapping jaws arrest;
Subdue him with thy trampling hoof,
Then from his maw the spoils wrest

Knight of knights, our banner-lord,
Send down the glory of the sun;
For glory is the knight's reward
And in the battle is it won

Thine the sword, the spear, the lance,
Thine the fearless charging steed;
At thy word the bold advance
To carve a tale of glorious deeds!

Thunder on from Starry throne
To war against the traitor's vice;
Behold my true devotion, shown
By fair bouquet of edelweiss!

XII: The Great Ox

To the Great Constellation, the Ox of the East,
Who upholdeth the barley and hale winter wheat,
Thou whose thundering hoofprints the soil doth plow
And who everywhere shaketh off seeds that are sown
To spring up in thy wake, incomparable corn
From the Sunlit Lands hailing, of higher stock born;
Unto thee whom the summer wind traileth behind
Which caresseth the face and of bygones remindeth
Poor plowmen, all weary from tending the wheat,
Evoking the glory of autumnal feasts,
And whose rippling power is graciously lent
To the laborer so far afield who hath spent
Every moment since dawn in the sun and the rain,
In the cutting and treading of life-giving grain;
It is thou who wilt surely attend to our plea,
For a peril befalleth, and dire is our need;
We appeal to thy power, thou stalwart and grand,
For the bile of the enemy blighteth the land;
All the flowers have faded, the mules have gone blind,
The snow peas have rotted to pulp on the vine,
Not an egg to a basket, our chickens lay none
And the amaranth blooms have all dullened to dun;
The Abyss never resteth, it curseth the ground
From the caverns below, lest by daylight is found
And it shall not desist while it grippeth our home
By the throat, it shall strangle until it alone
Trampleth over the treetops and choketh the roots,

Madly withering branches and starving the fruits;
And yet these machinations of famine and blight
Are mere weeds to the Yoke-Bearer, brighter than ripening
Fields in the life-giving midsummer heat
With the wind gently combing the locks of the wheat;
From the East o'er the mountains the Ox draweth nigh,
Dragging plows that turn over the dead soil alive;
Thumb thy nose at his backside, that coward Abyss,
See him turn tail and flee from mere shoots that were kissed
By the quickening sun from the world's warming hearth
Where the night ne'er descends, for the Stars dwell on earth;
So come forth, mighty Ox, come and hone thy grim horns
And make ready to war against those who are born
From below; come defend us, the powerless lot,
Who with spade over sword are attending our plots;
Attend all the same, for we trust in thy iron-clad
Will to protect and thy right to command;
For surely there is no more comforting sight
Than an Ox in the field and the dawn's early light,
And no locust sent forth from the wildest of nightmares
Could bear to behold him who shineth far brighter than
Ripening fields in the midsummer heat,
With the wind gently combing the locks of the wheat